

THE LEGEND

by J.R. "Barney" Olesen

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"Roping a Rustler"
Painting by Charles Russell

IN 1916, Charles Russell, the now very famous cowboy artist, came to Saco, Montana. He was there to visit the Larb hills to view the landscape for the background of his now famous painting, "Roping a Rustler." The painting depicts a large grizzly bear fighting against the ropes holding it captive. The actual incident occurred in a roundup in 1914.

Some fifty years later, a monument was erected in Saco to honor Charles Russell, the roundup, and the old-time cowboys involved. The monument states the roundup was for the DHS, Lewistown, with a cow camp south of Saco and the square, south of Saco. It lists Frank Patterson, representative for the Circle C south of Malta, as getting first rope and Joe Reynolds, representative for the Long X south of Glasgow, with the second rope. Also listed are Tony Garcia, horse wrangler for the square and Moses Carrywater as cook.

As in many stories of the old west, there has developed certain differences of opinion about the true facts. In the May 24, 1951 issue of the *Saco Independent* newspaper there appeared companion articles in which Tony Garcia claimed there were two bears roped that year and he had first rope on one. The location varies between thirty and fifty miles south of town. It has been reported by all who were there that the bear was a big black bear - half-grown black bear. At any rate, the bear was apparently not a big grizzly as depicted in the painting. I have been told that the steel stake was driven to mark the spot at about thirty-five miles from town. It is not clear to me which location was used for the painting.

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I came from Old Saco town,
We have a legend there.
It's about the old Larb hills,
Some cowboys and a bear.

The roundup was nineteen four,
Fro the DHS and the Square.
Reps from the Long X and Circle C,
Both had their cowboys there.

While riding up a little draw,
They came across a grizzly bear.
Made loops and threw the ropes,
They roped that grizzly bear.

It was the Long X and Circle C,
He had no choice but to fight.
The horses gone all crazy,
Nearly dying of fright.

They had him dallied tight,
Were putting on quite a show.
I guess they hadn't figured,
If there was a way to let him go.

And it was quite apparent,
Only winners would survive.
When their show was over,
The cowboys were still alive.

They story is another cowboy ---
You can believe this or not,
Used a jackknife and a rock,
Killed the bear without a shot.

As for Charley Russell,
I know he wasn't there.
In sixteen he put it on canvas,
For all the world to share.

There are some who say,
They claim that they know,
Charley used artistic license,
Caused that bear to grow.

And now in old Saco town,
A monument is standing there.
It is for old Charley Russell,
Those cowboys, and the bear.